

Approved For Release 2004/12/02 : CIA-RDP80R01720R000700050063-7

1 March 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: 28 February Session with Secretary Laird

1. My session with Secretary Laird on Monday, 28 February 1972, lasted from 1100 to 1145. Also present were Major General Pursley and former Ambassador Kenneth A. Rush, the new Deputy Secretary of Defense. After opening banter, I brought up the matter of Agency intelligence support to the Defense Department Project [REDACTED] and handed Laird a personal copy of our 17 February memorandum, with attachments, previously sent to Admiral Whitmire and General Manor. (This is the package you endorsed prior to its dispatch.) Laird skimmed through the covering memorandum, said he would read it more carefully later, and thanked me for a thorough job. He asked if I would be submitting a separate evaluation of the project's chances of success for his private edification. I demurred and noted that the points he had raised were all covered in the memorandum before him, which discussed all of the security hazards likely to be involved. This seemed to satisfy him. I also noted that it would simplify our continuing relations with his colleagues in the Defense Department if they had the text of anything given to him, and vice versa. (Actually, what I was trying to avoid was letting Laird have a private document that he could pocket and then use as a basis for a claim that he was willing to endorse the project but the Agency shot it down.)

25X1

2. We had a general review of the past week's activities in Vietnam and in China. No new or startling ideas were advanced. Laird then asked if the Agency could do a detailed analysis of the relative capabilities and strengths of the South Vietnamese and North Vietnamese armed forces. I reminded him that General Karhohs had already asked us to take a look at North Vietnam's capabilities to conduct offensive air operations against South Vietnam in 1973 and beyond, and had also asked us to look at North Vietnam's ability to prevent South Vietnam air operations over the Laos Panhandle and over South Vietnam's MR's 1 and 2, assuming no USAF involvement. Laird said his request, obviously, was considerably broader than the one levied by General Karhohs and, in effect, subsumed it. Laird amplified his wishes by explaining that he wanted to examine the relative status of the armed forces of North and South Vietnam with respect to equipment,

Approved For Release 2004/12/02 : CIA-RDP80R01720R000700050063-7

training, leadership, morale, and overall effectiveness. He was trying to get a handle on their respective capabilities to defend their own home territory and to project military power into each others territory.

3. I observed that this was a very tall order and a task that could not be meaningfully tackled without some very specific assumptions about aid levels, particularly to the South Vietnamese. We can assume that the Soviet and Chinese aid to North Vietnam would remain relatively consistent but the answers to the questions he had posed so far as South Vietnam was concerned obviously hinged on the type and level of U.S. support that would be provided. Laird answered by saying we should assume no U.S. support to South Vietnam. I noted that this, literally interpreted, was patently ridiculous, given South Vietnam's total lack of industrial base or war-making potential. After further discussion, Laird suggested we postulate no U.S. ground forces and no U.S. air involvement, but a continuing level of U.S. supplies, spare parts, and such technical assistance (e.g. mechanics) as was absolutely essential. I did not agree to provide the paper, but did say I would examine his request and discuss it further with him or General Pursley.

4. As usual, Laird has a number of angles working here. Ideally, he would like a paper from the Agency saying no U.S. military participation in South Vietnam is necessary. This, he is obviously not going to get. On the other hand, it would not be politic to turn him down flat. I suggest that I call Pursley back and ask for a written statement of the questions Laird wants looked at, together with a rather detailed explanation of the assumptions we should factor into the problem. With that in hand, we can then tell how best to proceed.

5. The above conversation was followed by a rather tart disquisition on Laird's lack of solid information on the results of U.S. bombing -- a narration that struck me as intended more for Rush's ears than mine. Laird's pitch was a familiar one, namely, how much money he was spending on air dropped ordnance and how impossible it was for him to determine what good, if any, this vast expenditure of resources was producing. My contribution consisted of reminding him gently that BDA was primarily a Department of Defense responsibility, an observation he accepted with a wry grin.

6. Rush was extremely affable, but took almost no part in the conversation. Instead, he sat quietly observing what went on.

[REDACTED]
George A. Carver, Jr.

Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

Approved For Release 2004/12/02 : CIA-RDP80R01720R000700050063-7